

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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UNCLAS DUBLIN 00522

E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ECON, ELAB, EI
SUBJECT: NATIONAL WAGE AGREEMENT IN TROUBLE

REF: DUBLIN 414

1. THE EXECUTIVE COUNCILS OF IRELAND'S TWO LARGEST
UNIONS HAVE SURPRISINGLY DECIDED TO RECOMMEND TO
THEIR MEMBERS REJECTION OF THE RECENTLY-INITIALLED
NATIONAL PAY AGREEMENT (REFTEL). BETWEEN THEM THE
IRISH TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS UNION (ITGWU)
AND THE AMALGAMATED TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS'
UNION CONTROL 30 PERCENT OF THE VOTES IN THE IRISH
CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS, AND IT WILL BE VERY
DIFFICULT TO GET A MAJORITY FOR THE AGREEMENT.

2. VARIOUS OBSERVORS ARE STILL TRYING TO FIGURE
OUT ALL THE REASONS FOR THE SURPRISING ITGWU MOVE --
THE ATGWU, WITH A SIMILAR CONSTITUENCY, HAD NO
CHOICE BUT TO FOLLOW SUIT SINCE ITS DECISION WAS
MADE LATER. ITGWU VICE PRESIDENT JOHN CARROLL AND
GENERAL SECRETARY MICHAEL MULLEN, WHO ARE LEADING
THE MOVEMENT TO REJECT, SAY THEY OBJECT TO THE NON-
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MONETARY PARTS OF THE AGREEMENT, PARTICULARLY THE
CLAUSES ON RESTRICTING STRIKES BY COOLING OFF PERIODS,
SECRET BALLOTS, REQUIREMENT FOR A 50 PERCENT VOTE
OF ALL MEMBERS TO STRIKE, AND BINDING ARBITRATION.
THEY SAY THAT IF SUCH RESTRICTIVE PRINCIPLES ARE
ACCEPTED, THEN THEY MIGHT BE WRITTEN INTO LAW BY
THE COMMISSION WHICH IS WORKING ON A NEW INDUSTRIAL

RELATIONS CODE. LABOR MINISTER FITZGERALD POINTS OUT THAT THESE CLAUSES ARE LESS RESTRICTIVE THEN THE LAST AGREEMENT, WHICH WAS ACCEPTED BY THE UNIONS.

3. A SENIOR OFFICIAL OF THE LABOR MINISTRY TOLD US THAT THE REVOLT IS, INDEED, SERIOUS. HE SAID THERE IS AN EXPANDING RADICAL ELEMENT IN THE ITGWU WHICH HAS GAINED CONSIDERABLE LEVERAGE IN THE LAST YEAR. ALSO SOME OF THE ITGWU LEADERS ARE WORRIED ABOUT A LOSS OF MEMBERS TO "PRIATE" UNIONS OUTSIDE THE IRISH CONGRESS. THIS OFFICIAL SAID THAT IF THE ICTU VOTES TO REJECT THE AGREEMENT, A RENEGOTIATION MIGHT BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE THE EMPLOYERS HAVE ALREADY GONE VERY FAR.

4. COMMENT: THIS DEVELOPMENT CASTS COLD WATER ON THE GOVERNMENT'S AMBITIOUS ECONOMIC PROGRAM. A MAJOR ELEMENT WAS A MODERATE WAGE AGREEMENT. SHANNON

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